

Whitefish Area Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan  
March 4, 2004 Public Hearing

6:30-8:30 pm  
Grouse Mountain Lodge

**Summary of Meeting**

Members of the DNRC staff and Trust Lands Advisory Committee hosted a public meeting to educate community of progress in developing the Neighborhood Plan. Stations were set up for each sub-unit of the 13,000 acres where the community could review and respond to the draft goals and policies for each neighborhood. Written comments were submitted through this process and interaction between the community members attending, DNRC staff and members of the Advisory Committee flowed in the informal set-up of the event. After an hour of perusing the available maps, goals, policies, and sub-neighborhood issues, there was a group public comment period in which people could voice their feedback, concerns and suggestions.

**Introductory Comments**

**Bob Sandman, DNRC Stillwater State Forest Manager**

Welcomes the group and expresses thanks and appreciation for community attending. Apologized for tactical error in the beginning of the planning process by starting out by telling the public what the DNRC wanted to do without telling the public why they wanted to do the plan.

Explained the serious problem with managing the lands to make money while being approached with various land use proposals. Impetus behind doing the Neighborhood Plan was to learn how to make the best decision for land use on these lands.

Says the idea of a Neighborhood Plan for this community is brilliant. The critical piece is to determine what the community values and marry this with the responsibility of making money for education and for schools.

Says the DNRC cannot determine the quality of life of Whitefish by themselves. "You need to tell us what that is. If we're successful in doing that, I guarantee you we will be able to then implement things that make money for the education of our kids and actually increase that amount and yet at the same time, not negatively affect the quality of life in Whitefish. In fact we may be able to enhance it. Now how cool is that. I'm so excited about this process it's not funny."

**Bob Brown, Secretary of State, Member of State Land Board**

"The whole idea is to get local input into the process in how we manage state lands. Because Whitefish is an area that is rapidly growing, it occurred to those of us on the Land Board that we could use some local input. And what may happen as a result is that could serve as a pilot for other communities around the state. Growing pains that are being experienced in other rapidly growing communities are also being experienced here in the Whitefish area. It is possible that what we do here can serve as a model for the Gallatin Valley, the Bitterroot Valley, the Yellowstone Valley, and so forth. It is a



good process. It needs to be a broad process. It needs a lot of local input. And hopefully, the guidance that is provided by this committee will help us use the state land in the Whitefish area in a way that will benefit the community as well as the school trust which is the constitutional obligation of the Land Board."

### **Public Comment**

New Advisory Committee Website: [www.statetrustlands.com](http://www.statetrustlands.com).

Comprehensive site that addresses the issues and give the public an opportunity to comment online.

Mike Jopek:

Planning is a difficult process. It is a good process. Better plan will come out with the most public input. Emphasizes the importance of traditional historic uses of the land. With current zoning, there could be 500 housing acres on the 13,000 acres. Where are you going to put them? Specifics are very important in implementation strategies. The reason why is because this plan will be interpreted in the future by the County Commissioners as development proposals come forward. The overall vision for the area by the committee will be interpreted. Preferred alternative give it time to be established. Regarding school funding: Interesting that school funding is determined by our Legislature. The legislature decides how much money goes into the schools. If there is an excess of funding generated by the DNRC, then that money goes into the General Fund. DNRC lands generate only about 6-10% of overall school funding. There should be a cost-benefit analysis that goes into this planning process. High costs goes into poorly planned developments.

David Streeter(sp)?:

Outdoor recreationalist. Planning process is great to see. We have the opportunity right now to keep all these state lands green and open. Keep the quality of life close to Whitefish instead of developing the hell out of them. Keep funding schools on a sustainable yield basis, not by a one-time money grab to fill in Martz's loopholes that she gave away to the corporations for the past few years.

Sandy Horowitz:

Board member of Citizens for a Better Flathead and a Developer. Once these properties are gone, they are gone. Can't afford to make stupid mistakes. CBBF feels the plan lacks specificity. Increase the scope of the work to increase the specificity of the plan. The strength of the plan is in the details. Take the time and use the necessary resources available to build a sound and factual plan for recommendation. MEPA will provide guidance for development of state lands. Develop alternative scenarios. Community Viz. available as a resource to the Advisory Committee, which is a build-out project from CBBF. Submitted written comments to the Committee.



John Phelps:

Thanks advisory committee and the DNRC for including the community in the process. Choices, decision and options by the Advisory Committee may need legal advice. He can help find legal council for the Advisory Committee to provide back up as they proceed in the process.

Rhonda Fitzgerald:

Emphasizes need for a cost-benefit analysis. Doesn't think the process started where it should have at the beginning. Costs not addressed at the front end of the plan, such as associated costs of fighting fires in the urban interface. It could be very expensive to protect developed lands from fire. DNRC knows how much money it costs to fight a fire on 1 acre of land of timberland vs. how much it costs to fight fire on 1 acre of land with a luxury home on it. She maintains that the cost to the taxpayer will far outweigh the benefit to the taxpayer. This should be addressed at the beginning of the process not later.

Mayre Flowers:

Regarding Draft Revenue Goals-Constitutional mandate is not only to benefit the school trust, but also to do it in a way that benefits the local community. Suggests expanding this goal to include the benefit to the local community.

Bick Smith:

Number one thing we should be looking at here is fire. We have a very unique opportunity here to look at a band of land on the west side and windward side of our town. Huge benefits for the community and for future generations. He proposes that the committee make this a number one preference before doing anything else.

Chris Rupallo(sp?):

Representing Haskill Creek. Runs the Creek Flow program at Whitefish High School, which has about 40 students. They put together a publication on the entire watershed of Haskill Creek. This includes inventory from Big Mountain to Whitefish River and water quality data from right below Section 16. There is about twelve years of science from the Creek Flow program. Submits his written comments to committee.

Alan Elm, Advisory Committee Chairman:

Tells the community that State Auditor John Morrison said that group can petition the Land Board for an extension for the planning process if necessary. Emphasizes the importance for the public to come to the meetings, to stay informed, and encourages them to visit the website, talk to committee members, and participate in public comment period at the end of each Advisory Committee meeting. Meetings are held the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month at the North Valley Hospital Community Room.

Meeting Adjourned.